

Holiday Eating
LCDR Gail M. Strong, M.S., R.D.
USNH Okinawa Nutrition Management Department

The holidays are upon us, along with celebrations. Celebrations traditionally involve people gathering, enjoying one another's company and often the sharing of food. The average person gains about five pounds during the months of November through January. Refrain from becoming a statistic by putting the following points to practice:

- **MAINTAIN YOUR WEIGHT:** It may not be realistic to lose weight during the season, but you can make a goal to maintain your weight. Balance your food intake with your activity level. Weigh yourself a couple of times a week, if the scale goes up a few pounds then cut out extras such as desserts and second helpings, while adding an evening walk. These actions bring your weight back down without drastic food deprivation. Reducing your extra food intake and increasing activity catches weight gain early.
- **INCREASE YOUR ACTIVITY:** Activity can help maintain weight while relieving stress. Activity will balance out the occasional cookie sampling or the potluck at work. Starting a regular routine of activity can also improve your well being. You will deal with the stress and demands of the holidays better. If you already exercise, increase the intensity or adding something you don't normally do, like weight training if you are a runner.
- **REGULAR MEALS:** Do not skip meals, especially not breakfast. Eat every three to five hours, throughout the day. Snacks are okay too; carry them with you when you are out shopping and running errands. Eat eggs or oatmeal and fruit for breakfast; soup and a salad with protein for lunch and a fruit smoothie before the big dinner buffet. Avoid showing up at a party overly hungry, this may lead to overeating. Schedule the times and items you plan to eat for meals and snacks and don't forget to carry water with you.
- **PARTY STRATEGIES:** When you get to the party sit or stand away from the food. Scope out the buffet, what do you really want to eat? Select only foods that you can only get this time of year, like the spiced ham or pumpkin pie. Don't overindulge on the store-bought dinner rolls that you can get year round! Make one trip to the buffet and select fruits, vegetables and lean meats, and drink plenty of calorie-free beverages. Monitor your body's feelings of hunger and fullness.
- **MEAL PLANNING:** Holidays are busy, so plan ahead. Make a menu plan, grocery list and then shop accordingly. If you have a plan you avoid deciding what to eat when you are tired, bored or hungry. If there are several potlucks that you are invited to, offer to bring the fruit or vegetables. This guarantees there will be something for you to eat. You can order the tray ahead of time from the commissary or prepare enough fruit or vegetables to cover several gatherings.
- **AVOID OVEREATING:** When there is an abundance of good food the temptation can be to eat a lot. Realize that there will be other opportunities for you to eat these dishes, do not stuff yourself to the point of feeling

uncomfortable. Food does not have to be the center of the party. Alcohol contains empty calories and can stimulate the appetite. Liquors, sweet wines and sweet mixed drinks can contain up to 450 calories per glass. Watch your intake of regular soda, punch, juice and eggnog as well. Water and diet sodas are calorie free and are a better choice.

- **RECIPE ADJUSTMENT:** You can reduce the fat or sugar in most recipes or use a leaner cut of meat. Bake, broil or steam your foods rather than frying. Seasonings such as herbs, spices and lemon can increase flavor when reducing the fat. Adjust some recipes by using nonfat milk or cheese instead of whole fat dairy products. Two egg whites can be used in the place of one whole egg or dried fruit can replace nuts in baking. Evaporated skim milk can replace cream and applesauce can be used in the place of oil.

Overeating at one meal does not break your healthful eating lifestyle. Overindulging for a two to three month period leads to weight gain and possibly undesirable crash or fad diets. So enjoy your holidays, but use balance to ensure a lifetime of health.